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GAZETTEER OF INDIA



GUJARAT STATE

KUTCH DISTRICT

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गन्धर्वमेव जयते

KUTCH DISTRICT

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drawn from all classes of people irrespective of their original creed. Bhuj is one of the important centres visited by the founder for preaching and propagating his religious teachings. When Sahajanand Swami came to Kutch it was a period of political anarchy, social disorder and laxity in matters religious created by the irresponsible administration of Rao Raydhan and his successors early in the nineteenth century. Through his preachings he rekindled their faith in religion and saved people from moral degeneration. Inspired by his teachings a large number of cultivators, labourers and artisans in Kutch became his followers. The Swaminarayan temple at Bhuj is an important centre of pilgrimage visited by a large number of devotees coming from all over Gujarat.

Jainism—Jainism has flourished on the land of Kutch since ancient times as witnessed by the shrine at Bhadresar which has been built and rebuilt a number of times and preserved intact to this day. It is an important centre of pilgrimage visited by Jains from all over Gujarat. The Jains are an important community in the district accounting for 9.13 per cent of its total population as against 1.99 per cent for the State as a whole. Jainism preaches *tapa* or austerity, control of the mind and passions, *ahimsa* and renunciation of all worldly pleasures and attachments to attain *moksha* or liberation. Jains worship the images of all the 24 *tirthankars* in their temples wherein are also found images of Hindu gods and goddesses in some side niches, at times under different names. The main followers of Jainism in Kutch are Shravak Vantias who belong to Dasha and Visha Shrimali and Kutchi Oswal castes. Shwetambar and Digambar are the two major divisions of Jainism. Shwetambar monks put on white clothes and Digambar monks having directions as their clothes wear no clothes. The major point of difference between the two is whether the injunction to renounce all worldly possessions for achieving salvation should be carried to the extreme by dispensing even with clothes and practising nudity.

Islam—The chief articles of Islamic faith are belief in the unity of God; in his Angels; in His books; in His prophets; in His Government of the world; in good and evil as coming from Him; and in the day of Resurrection. Muslims in the district constitute 18.54 per cent of the total population, the highest among all districts of Gujarat according to the Census of 1961. Among the two leading sects of Islam found in the district, Sunni and Shiah, the former are more common. The group of Shiahs known as Ismailis whose Imam or religious head is His Highness the Aga Khan belong to the Khoja community. The famous Khoja Pir well-known as Gulamali Shah, a descendant of Pir Sadrudin, who had, during 16th century attracted many Hindus of Gujarat and Kutch to embrace Islam by converting them as Ismaili Khojas, had settled at Kera in this district in 1792 A. D. After his death at Karachi in 1796 his body was brought to Kera and was ceremonially buried there. His *dargah* at Kera constructed thereafter has become a place of pilgrimage for all Khojas of Kutch.

These Sindhi Hindus can be further divided into sub-castes of Lohanas, Bhatiyas, Brahmins and Brahma-kshatris. Out of them Lohanas form 92 per cent and the remainder 8 per cent. The Lohanas are merchants.

Their dress is undergoing a considerable change ; garments of foreign materials and cut are every day becoming more prevalent. The educated and official classes, more particularly among the Amils, have evolved a compromise between western and Indian dress. The Bhaibandhs put on *dhotar*, shirt and a small round cap on the head.

Their chief festivals are Mahashivratri, Holi, Chetichand, Thadri, Dassera, and Divali. The first is specially observed by the votaries of Siva, who fast and decorate the *lingam*. The Holi, or Hori as it is also called, is also observed. Chetichand, the Hindu New Year, the first day of Chet Sudh, is observed with great pomp. The Thadri in Sawan is the occasion for much gambling. The Dassera and Divali or Diari are the two most important festivals of the Hindus ; the former is celebrated and the latter with display of lamps.

The joint family system exists, but with diversification of occupations, it is gradually disintegrating. The tendency is for the sons to separate on the death of the father, and among Hindus, the family generally breaks up on the death of both parents.

Their names are usually formed by suffixing to appropriate nouns such terminations as—das, 'slave' ; mal, 'brave' ; 'ram,' an incarnation of deity ; nand, "the name of Krishna's father" ; rai, 'a king' ; and chand, 'the moon'. Thus Narayandas means 'the servant of Narayan', i. e., God ; Hotchand signifies the friend of the moon. The followers of Guru Nanak and others attach the termination Singh, 'lion', to certain words, e. g., Awat Singh. Some Sikhs even use the Persian termination Bakhsh, e. g., Gobind Bakhsh. By some, the names of the days of the week are employed, though both Shukur (Friday) and Chanchar (Saturday) are avoided, being considered unlucky. Among Hindus, the descendants of a common ancestor are designated by an adjectival form of his name ; thus Gidvani from Gidu, Advani from Adu ; and a tendency is exhibiting itself in the educated ranks of the younger generation to extend the use of the cognomen with a view to introduction of the European style, but the paucity of names exposes the system to obvious disadvantages.

About the sub-divisions among the Muslims, the old *Kutch Gazetteer* made certain observations. Spread of Islam in the district was partly by conversion and partly by immigration of several Islamic groups. Some of the immigrants from Sindh and Gujarat are, more or less of foreign descent, and others purely Hindu. The local Muslim converts are from among Kutch Hindus. With a few exceptions, they speak Kutchhi. Gujarati is

spoken by a few. The castes which are numerically important among the Muslims are Khoja, Memon, Miyana and Teli. Though numerically small groups, Arabs and Balochs deserve notice. Khojas are traditional traders. Memons especially those in rural areas are mostly cultivators. Telis called Ghanchis are employed in their hereditary work of oilpressing, whereas Miyanas work as fishermen, labourers or agriculturists.

Among the Muslims, the Saiyads are teachers, cultivators and servants. They follow the same social customs like birth, marriage and death as other Muslims.

The Shaikhs are cattle-dealers and cultivators. Their social customs are the same as followed by the other Muslims in the district. They are Sunnis. They follow religious guides, *pirs*, to whom some special fees and certain small annual sums are paid.

The Moghuls who were formerly employed in the military service of the State work as servants. They are mainly found in Bhuj. In matter of custom, they do not differ from the other Muslims. They are Sunnis. While the Pathans serve as soldiers and in matters like custom and religion, they are similar to other Muslims. They speak Hindustani mixed with Kutchhi and Gujarati.

The Momnas are found in the Bhuj taluka chiefly in the Girasia villages. They are cultivators and labourers. They are converts from Hinduism, but do not associate with Muslims, do not do circumcision, offer no five daily prayers and do not keep Ramzan fast. They are Shias. Their language is Kutchhi.

The Khojas are generally found all over the district but mainly in Mandvi, Mundra and Anjar and have a large settlement in Bhuj. They are traders. In matter of customs, they form a distinct community whose caste disputes are settled by mass meetings and have mass marriages. In matter of religion, they are Shias of the Nazarian Ismaili sect. They follow His Highness the Agha Khan whom they worship. Their language is Kutchhi.

The Sammas are found all over the district. They are cultivators, cattle breeders and dealers. They follow the social customs similar to those followed by other Muslims. They are Sunnis by faith. The Sammas of the west keep their Hindu bards and have also spiritual guides, *pirs*. Those in the east honour the ordinary *maulvis*. They speak Kutchhi.

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The Memans are mainly found in Bhuj taluka, though scattered over the district. They are cultivators, labourers and traders. In matter of customs, they do not differ from other Sunnis. They form a distinct

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